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ABSTRACT

This booklet, which was developed for the staff of field projects rather than for professional evaluators or researchers, provides guidelines for evaluating projects which promote activities to enhance the well-being of young children, their families, and their communities. The booklet aims to stimulate ideas and discussion, offers general principles to help in evaluation, and raises issues which encourage project personnel to seek local resources. Aspects of the evaluation process discussed include: (1) factors to consider when starting an evaluation; (2) evaluation records; (3) time and cost of evaluation; (4) evaluation instruments; (5) data analysis; and (6) factors to consider when writing the results of an evaluation. Useful resources on evaluation are listed and briefly described. (MM)

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Introducing Evaluation

Willem van der Eyken

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Introducing Evaluation

A practical introduction to evaluation in early childhood projects

Willem van der Eyken

Bernard van Leer Foundation

1992

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Contents

	Foreword	iii
1	Introduction	1
2	Getting started	6
3	What do you know already?	9
4	Keeping records	14
5	Who is the evaluation for?	16
6	Who is going to do it?	19
7	What will you look at?	23
8	How long will it take and how much will it cost?	26
9	What measures should you use?	29
10	Analysing the data	36
11	Writing up the results	40
12	Some useful resources	44
13	User's reply form	55

Illustrations

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Seguel, Ximena, Bralic, Sonia and Edwards, Marta (1989) *Mas allá la Sobrevivencia/Beyond Survival* Santiago, Chile: UNICEF/CEDEP (pages 7, 10 (below), 38, 41, 43)

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For the past 25 years, the Bernard van Leer Foundation has encouraged projects it supports to evaluate their work locally. The main focus of Foundation-supported projects is the promotion of activities that enhance the well-being of young children, their families, and the communities that surround them. The emphasis in *Introducing Evaluation* is, therefore, on the evaluation of such projects.

Introducing Evaluation is aimed specifically at staff of field projects rather than at professional evaluators or researchers. It does not aim to offer concrete solutions or methodologies – instead it aims to stimulate ideas and discussion. It does not set out to tell project staff 'how' to do evaluation; rather it tries to offer some general principles which may be of help, and to raise

issues which may stimulate projects to seek out local resources and explore their own approaches.

Some of the contents may not be relevant for a particular project. Other sections may be too technical. In that case, ignore them! We want this publication to be *of use* to projects, a tool for self-discovery. We recognise and accept that its use will be limited. It is not intended to be a substitute for local discussions and thought, but a spur to it.

We are anxious to learn whether it is indeed useful, and we invite projects not only to tell us *how* they have used it, and *what* they have found helpful, but to contribute their own evaluation experiences, measures and ideas.

Willem van der Eyken,
Head, Studies and Evaluation,
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The Hague, The Netherlands

October 1992

We all evaluate. All the time.

All of us throughout the day check *our own* actions. Are we on time? Do we have the bus fare? Have we put the appointment in our diary? Have we done the right shopping?

Of course we don't call this evaluation; we are just checking, making sure. But we all do it and it is an essential part of our daily life. Without checking, we could make serious mistakes or forget to do things. We could even become totally lost in the bustle of our busy and complex worlds. So we check, we make lists, we keep diaries, we record phone numbers, we remind ourselves about tasks still to be undertaken, or unfinished.

When we work collaboratively with other people, we naturally adopt the same procedures. We observe what is happening. We write each other letters, or ring each other up. We meet and discuss progress. Occasionally we review our situation. We keep records and notes. We check. Intuitively, we all *monitor* our activities.

But we do more than that. From our observations, records and notes we begin to formulate new questions about our work. If, for example, we are running a family centre, we may ask why the same families always seem to come to our centre? Why do

so few come on Wednesdays? Why do so many more girls come than boys? Why do some of the parents never come?

These new questions cannot usually be answered simply from our records, although these may prove valuable in suggesting where we should look for answers. So we have to seek new information, which will enable us to come to some satisfactory explanations. But what kind of information? And where should we look for it? How should we go about getting it? And if we were successful, would it really reveal what we want to know?

We are beginning to 'evaluate' our project. In fact, we have already come so far that it is worth stopping for a moment to draw some basic lessons from our experience.

First, we have recognised the need to keep a check on what we are doing, just as we do in our daily lives.

That is to say, *we monitor our performance*.

But this only allows us to *describe* what we do.

Next, we need to ask questions about the situation, to analyse it. To *evaluate* it. To answer these questions, we need to seek new information.

That is, we have *to gather data*.

We have to decide what to collect, and how to obtain it. We also have to organise the information in such a way that it will enable us to learn from the results, and to understand what is happening.

And then we have to explain what we have discovered, in ways that will help others also to learn and understand from our experience.

We have to *communicate our findings*.

So *monitoring* allows us to describe what we are doing.

And *evaluation*, which involves an element of *analysis*, is about learning from, and understanding, that experience.

We can see these different stages as part of a *process*, as something that goes on almost without end. It is unlikely, for example, that our original questions will all be satisfactorily answered as a result of gathering some additional information. More realistically, it may enable us to ask new questions, or to pose the old ones in a more sophisticated way.

Questions, questions! Don't we ever get any answers? Yes, of course, but the answers are themselves only partial. We can never know everything about our projects, or about other people or their children. But the very process of refining our questions is part of our increasing perception of the issues we are confronting in our work. Hopefully, we continually refine our initial perceptions by producing more sharply-focused evidence on which to base our judgements and conclusions.

So evaluation is a continuing process, the outcomes of which should feed back into a project and act as a spur to collect new data. Moreover, that data has to be processed, or presented in a way that enables its *message* to be understood. A bus or train timetable is the result of a lot of information about all traffic movements, condensed into a form where it can be used by passengers. Similarly, project data has to be organised in such a way that the information can be interpreted.

Evaluation is not about establishing 'certainties' or even about 'proving' anything. Rather, it is a process which helps us see more clearly what it is we are doing, and the nature of the issues being confronted. It is a 'way of seeing'.

This publication is an attempt to describe elements of this process. It includes some of the many questions that projects often ask about 'doing evaluation': How do you begin? Who is the project doing this for? What does the project want to know? When should it start? Who is going to do it? What will it all cost? How 'scientific' does it have to be? Will it offend or upset the families in our project?

Equally, there are a number of things this publication will *not* do:

it will *not* provide a Recipe Book on how to evaluate;

it will *not* offer packaged solutions for particular problems;

it will *not* provide statistical tricks to produce so-called 'scientific' results;

it will *not* use academic jargon to impress, or perhaps confuse;

and it will *not* stop you needing to think for yourself!

But why evaluate at all?

There are many reasons.

All projects should know what is happening as a result of their work so that they can improve their practice, question their progress, act as a training resource for staff and be able to tell others about their work. For example:

how successful is the project in achieving its original aims?

in what ways is it meeting the needs of the community that is using its resources?

what contacts has it made with others in the field?

what has worked, and what has not?

These are all questions about the project itself. But it is equally important to know what *impact* the project has had on the lives and prospects of the people it was intended to serve. What effect has the project had on the children, on their families, on the wider community? Has anything really changed and, if so, what? And was this change really brought about by the project? Moreover, if there really have been changes, then we all want to try to understand how those changes came about. What was it, within the project, that brought about such changes? Can the process of change be illustrated by, perhaps, looking at the histories of the families themselves?

In other words, the evaluation should show what the *process* has been, whether the process has led to outcomes and, if so, what has been the *impact* of these outcomes.

There is also the need to influence others – be they governments, non-governmental agencies, sponsors,

professional services, trainers, academics and policy makers – about the most appropriate and effective forms of help for deprived communities, as well as to convince governments and agencies to devote more resources to the needs of early childhood development. This *advocacy* role is most powerful when we can provide strong evidence for our assertions.

> 'Promise me this,' said the Reasonable Social Scientist. 'I know your project is inspired by the philosophy of Paulo Freire. We have nothing against Paulo Freire. But please do a useful evaluation. All we want are some data showing the benefits achieved through the use of his methods, and the cost of achieving them. Give us some information we can use in our decision-making process.' (Howard Richards, *The Evaluation of Cultural Action*, Macmillan, 1985, Pps 10–11)

Evaluation, then, has many consumers, all of whom have different needs.

First and foremost among these, however, is the project itself. If an evaluation is not of value to a project, then often it will not be of much interest to others either. Good evaluation throws up new questions, prompts fresh ideas, suggests different ways of looking at outcomes – all of which should act as a stimulus to projects, while at the same time providing them with the raw material with which to enter into a dialogue with local, regional or even national bodies.

The two forms of evaluation – internal and external – described in this publication (and there are many more) are not mutually exclusive. They often flow into one another, as part of an overall evaluation strategy. It is the development of that strategy, as well as its execution, which often creates problems for projects. *Introducing Evaluation* has been prepared to help with that process. It is designed to be used. To help in this process, we have included a form at the back for your comments. We hope to hear from you.

Evaluation begins as soon as, and sometimes before, a proposal for a project is drafted.

You have an idea. You want to work with a particular group of children and families, and perhaps you want to try out a particular approach. But, of course, you do not know whether it will work. You will have to innovate, and see how the community responds. Nothing is certain.

What, then, makes you think the project will be successful? Even more important, how would you define the word 'success' for this particular scheme?

One way of tackling this is to ask yourself and your colleagues what you would hope to see as an outcome of the project in say three to five years from now. Of course you want to see changes. But what kind of changes? And if you can decide on what changes you *most* want to achieve, go on to ask how you might observe these changes. What would you expect to see? In other words, what would make you say that the project was a 'success'?

Evaluation begins and ends with questions. Asking the right questions is the most difficult part of the whole process.

One technique that is very useful is to bring your staff together and ask them what they think the project is about. You may be surprised at the variety of interpretations they offer. Then ask the people who are involved with the project. They, again, will provide many different views, which may disagree with your own, because people differ in the way that they perceive what projects are doing.

Projects that have vague or unclear goals tend to produce diffuse or unfocused evaluations. Good evaluation depends on clarity. This is not the same as simplicity.

You may decide that your project is about many things. We all want to change the world. But can we really do it?

Notice how your initial discussions about 'evaluation' begin by trying to understand the nature of the project. If you cannot clearly say what the project is supposed to be about, the evaluation is likely to be equally unclear. It's no use saying, to take an extreme example, that you want to 'make people feel better about themselves' or 'make children happier'. You need some hard, firm, recognisable goals. How would you know if people felt better about themselves? And that children are genuinely happier? And is that *really* your main aim?

If, to take a more common example, your aim is to 'enhance' child-parent relationships or to 'promote' better parenting, how do you specifically intend to go about it, and how would you recognise an 'enhanced' relationship or 'improved' parenting? What would you see? (Notice that these questions presume that you *know* what a 'good' relationship, or 'good' parenting, consists of. Do you?)

Who takes part in these discussions? The answer is clear. Everyone who can make a contribution. Not just key staff, but everyone involved with the project – parents, workers, local people, professionals.

Ask them:

> Why are we undertaking this project?
>
> What is really new or innovative about the scheme?
>
> What do we hope to do that others are not already doing?
>
> Why is that important?
>
> What major needs has the project identified in the community?
>
> And what does the community say it really wants?

If you can, write their replies down on a large sheet of paper and hang it in a place where other people can write their own

ideas. Come back to it regularly and use it as a way of focusing the objectives of your project.

> Evaluation is a collaborative exercise. It 'belongs' to everyone concerned with a project, and only if people are involved will its outcomes be accepted and valued and will it cease to be a marginal activity.

Notice that you have already begun to evaluate. Some argue that evaluation should only begin when there is 'something to evaluate'. That leaves out the whole area of *process*, of how that 'something' happened. What you are interested in is the 'process of change', and that happens right from the start.

> Remember that evaluation should always be undertaken in a spirit of 'valuing' a project. Its aim is to enhance, not denigrate.

Now you need to ask:

What do you know already – about the area, the people, the community's problems?

3 What do you know already?

No project should begin in complete ignorance of its setting or environment, or of the people it seeks to serve. Often there is quite a lot of information, but it is perhaps not available in a form in which it can be used. Or it may be out-of-date. Or it simply does not tell you what you need to know. But don't assume that the knowledge does not exist. Long before your project began, people lived in the area, grew up there, raised families there.

At the very beginning of the project, or before if possible, get staff to identify local people with an intimate knowledge of the environment, and seek out any possible reports, books, old photographs and maps which may help to explain characteristics of the area.

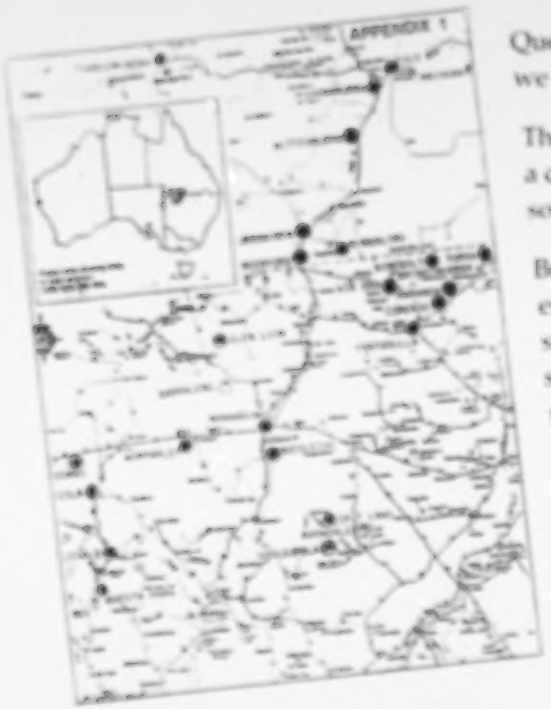
A team exercise in writing a 'history' of the region, with different people taking a topic each – customs, economy, geography, type of housing, traditions, politics, culture – can help put the work of the project into a more informed, and therefore more sensitive, setting.

That setting is important. It is the context which will influence the whole of the evaluation. Whether the project operates in the north of Scandinavia, the Deep South of the USA, a plantation in Malaysia, an inner-city industrial slum or a remote rural area in Australia is, in itself, a key element of the whole evaluation.

> Projects often forget that, while they are very familiar with the site of their activities, others are not. So a series of maps act as an invaluable aid to communication. They can show the region of the country where you operate, the site of the project itself and sometimes its catchment area: the area from which it attracts its families.

'Placing' a project – in its environment, in its culture, even in its physical space – is important if the outcomes of the evaluation are to be properly appreciated and understood.

For some projects, the location of their facilities is critical. How do you explain a project that aims to reach isolated families in remote areas covering 36,000 square kilometres of the Paroo region of north-west New South Wales and south-west



Queensland, Australia? You need a map. Here we see how the project showed its locations.

There are many other occasions when a map, a chart or a sketch will illustrate and inform some aspect of a project's work.

Below is one example, taken from an evaluation conducted in Chile. The aim was simply to describe where the poor families surveyed in the study actually lived. It does so with striking clarity.

It is sometimes important to establish what already exists within the community; what resources it has, where these are located and how they are possibly linked. Rather than writing all this into a report, it is sometimes much clearer to draw a series of charts or sketches, showing the links between a neighbourhood and its local services.

Charts, maps and diagrams are a valuable form of direct communication. They enable a lot of information to be conveyed in a simple and clear way. They can help to locate your project, explain local problems and describe the setting.

What do you know already?

Sometimes it is possible to compress a lot of background information into a simple, well-organised table. Here is an example from a baseline study from rural Nigeria.

Nearest Town, Number of Houses and Available Amenities of Surveyed Settlements

Settlement	Nearest Town	No of Houses	Amenities within Settlement
Imini	Ilora (Northwest)	150	Dispensary, Primary and secondary school
Ago Oyo	Ilora (Northwest)	59	Primary school
Onifa	Ilora (North)	40	Primary School
Oke-Ago	Awe (Southeast)	18	-
Aroloyin	Awe (Southeast)	6	-
Ajagbe	Awe (East)	22	Maternity, Primary School
Okikiola	Oyo (Northwest)	22	-
Olorunda	Oyo (Northwest)	34	-

What does this table *not* tell us? It suggests that centres are 'near'. But what is the meaning of 'nearest'? Walking distance? Fifteen kilometres away?

Charts can also help to explain the administrative, political and decision making structures of an area, which may be important if the project is concerned to alter the balance of these structures. You may, for example, want to explain how resources arrive at a particular village, and what administrative procedures have to be negotiated before they reach the people. Or you may want to indicate the various transport routes that affect a particular area. These may be vital for the economy of the region, and influence the lives of the people who live there. They may also help explain the problems that affect those lives and, therefore, have an impact on your project.

If your project seeks to effect changes over a period of some years, then you need to be sure that you have clearly set out what the position is at the beginning.

Much is already known. But it needs to be collated, organised and described in a way which will clearly put the work of the project into perspective. Much of that work can be done during the preparatory period, before any formal evaluation has been conducted.

In some areas there may be national statistics on, for example, children's school attendance and performance, the health of the community, housing, birth and mortality rates, or indicators of disadvantage, such as unemployment rates.

But it may also be the case that very little is known about the region in which you work. In that case, it is all the more important to learn all you can from the little that exists. At the same time, your project will have a real opportunity to add to the stock of national knowledge.

But while there is often little in the way of *official* knowledge, there is always an abundance of *local* knowledge. And that information lies with the people of the area.

At the same time, individual experiences cannot be used to draw conclusions about an entire community. Rather, individual case material is important as an 'illustration' of how local conditions can influence personal circumstances. In addition, this individual information can often direct attention to issues which might otherwise be missed.

> People are the richest source of information. By recording their stories, by interviewing them, and by inviting them to share their knowledge with others we can learn how general trends affect personal lives. What people say – how they feel and what they think and know – are *facts* every bit as valid and 'scientific' as the score of an IQ test or the response to a questionnaire or survey.

If you can put local knowledge and experience together with more general characteristics of the area, you will achieve a synthesis that offers an important understanding to the background of your project.

4 Keeping records

The 'spine' of a project's evaluation is its records. Because many people dislike the paperwork involved, it is important to establish a good record-keeping system at the very start of a project. In this way staff and others become familiar with, and accustomed to, a practice of recording before the programme becomes too hectic and complex.

Build into that practice a routine record-keeping procedure, with forms designed to be completed as simply and easily as possible so that, over time, the project is accumulating data which will provide an immediate check on what is happening.

But what records? Essentially, anything that relates to the central core of a project's activities. If a project works with children and their families, then it needs to know who uses the programme, and when. It also needs to know how involved all these people are with the project, and when they cease to be involved: you may want to visit them again some time later.

> Record-keeping is not only about administration; it is a form of writing the history of your project, and of the people who made it work. And that is a story worth telling!

But names and dates are really of little use unless they are backed by some more detailed information. How old were the children when they came to the project? Where did they live? Why did they come? Did they have any special problems?

The information that a project keeps on a day-to-day basis depends on what it is trying to do, and what it regards as relevant to its aims. Do not collect information just for the sake of it! Always ask: 'Why are we asking these questions? What are we going to do with the answers?' And be convinced that you really *can* do something!

Make sure that the records are stored properly; filed, perhaps, or put into folders. Do not forget that each record should have its own date. If personal information about individual children or families has been collected, ensure that those involved know precisely what data exists, that they can have access to it to check its accuracy, and that the project will ensure confidentiality. Never leave such material lying around.

Some projects like to keep a variety of records, reflecting their different and varied activities: weekly rota lists of parents; minutes of meetings; financial statements; summaries of conferences or discussions; children's programmes; lists of supportive outsiders; correspondence files and so on. Together, all these individual items make up a *database* of solid record-keeping.

Some like to keep track of the changes that occur within their own work. Once a week they produce a page or two of reflections on the major issues that have faced the project. These pages build up into a diary which, over time, becomes a valuable document in itself, tracing the events and the changing priorities within a project.

'Records', of course, do not have to consist of written words or of numbers. Photographs of the children, the staff, the families, the building (if there is one) and the surroundings are all good items of documentation. Some staff use tape recorders to record their meetings. Some projects make videos of their activities – but this is expensive, and requires special technical skills.

Many projects keep a 'cuttings' book: a scissors-and-paste collation of what others have written about them, in the press or in personal communications. Others collect materials produced by children and families – everything from paintings and craft work to play materials and teaching aids.

All of this is a form of project monitoring which provides the foundation on which a more formal evaluation can be built. Without any project record-keeping, an evaluation is severely limited. With a record-keeping system in place, we can move forward towards developing a more structured evaluation programme.

But first, a few more key decisions!

5 Who is the evaluation for?

We have already suggested a number of reasons why evaluation is important for a project. But when starting the process itself, staff need to ask: 'Who are we doing this work for?' In other words, what is the *purpose* of the evaluation? Who will be the audience? And what would they like to know? Another way of putting this is to ask: 'How will the project use the results?'

Answering those questions will enable you to focus on the essentials, cut out time-consuming and possibly irrelevant details, and influence not only what is evaluated, but the whole shape of the subsequent reports, their focus and the way in which they are presented. It also has a direct bearing on the timing of report-writing and the scope and detail of those documents.

You may say (and many people do) that the real purpose of the evaluation is to convince agencies and sponsors of the merits of the project so that they will provide subsequent funding for the work. Beware!

> There is a common tendency to confuse doing evaluation with the function of 'public relations'. It is important to keep a clear distinction between the two. Evaluation is not done in order to improve public relations. Rather, effective advocacy stems from good evaluation.

Your project certainly needs to keep the community informed about its work. It may well wish to make itself better known. And it may want to influence policy makers and professional agencies about what it is doing. In a word, it needs to work on 'publicity'. When the evaluation has been completed, or when parts of it are ready to be communicated, this may form an additional source of that publicity.

But if the evaluation is done in order to make your project 'look good', or if it focuses only on those aspects which you think may be 'successful', then it will have lost its basic property of enhancing your understanding of your work. It will have ceased to be an analytical 'way of seeing' your project. It will have lost its critical edge, its objectivity.

Who is the evaluation for?

There are many potential readers for this more analytical, objective review.

- First and foremost, there is the project itself. It needs to know how it is doing, whether it is meeting its targets, whether changes need to be made to the programme, and whether major policy decisions need to be faced. Moreover, it needs this information regularly and constantly – it cannot wait until the entire evaluation has been completed.
- There is the sponsor, and perhaps other co-sponsors. Their needs may not be so immediate, and they may need reports that are more measured, less frequent, but perhaps more detailed.
- There is the local community, which will certainly want to know what the project is achieving.
- There could be politicians, supporters, influential potential patrons, advisors and community leaders who may need brief but focused resumes of the outcomes.

KEEP GOING STRAIGHT AHEAD!!!
STOP! I WANT TO GET OFF!
I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING THAT WAY!
I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING THERE!
THIS IS THE BEST WAY!
THAT WAY!
THIS WAY!
I GOT ON THIS BUS BECAUSE IT WAS GOING THERE
EVALUATION
THAT'S WHERE I WANTED TO GO!

- There could be specialists in your area of work, who are interested in learning about specific findings, and whose involvement could be an important support for your project.
- And there is the press and the general media, who are always interested to hear if there is something new to say, and who should be kept informed about the outcomes.

Many of these readers may not want to know about the evaluation in great detail, but they will wish to be convinced that the findings are based on verifiable facts, and that the conclusions are – as much as possible – reasonable. All of them will need to be convinced that the evaluation is both *reliable* and *valid*.

Reliability + Validity = 'scientific'.

By *reliable* we mean that the evaluation is based on data which genuinely reflects the characteristics of the community with which you work.

By *valid* we mean that the conclusions you have drawn from the study can be supported by convincing evidence that they are sound.

Because these two qualities are so central to good evaluation, it then becomes an important consideration to ask: 'Who is going to do it?'

6 Who is going to do it?

For many projects, deciding who is going to undertake the evaluation, and identifying a competent and sympathetic evaluator, is one of the most difficult and key decisions that needs to be taken; and it is one that has to be made very early in a project's life.

It may seem strange to speak of a 'sympathetic' evaluator, when we have stressed the need for objectivity. But by 'sympathetic' we do not mean someone who will guarantee a favourable result. Rather, we stress that the evaluator should be someone who has a genuine interest in the work of the project, who feels comfortable about sharing the knowledge and working within a team, and who enjoys being involved in your type of work.

Essentially, you have two choices, which can be combined. Either the team does the work itself (internal or self-evaluation) or it asks – and pays for – someone from outside the project to undertake the task (external evaluation). Both strategies have advantages and drawbacks and many projects, as a result, combine the two by undertaking part of the work themselves, while also involving outside help.

Someone from inside

advantages

Knows the project, staff, families
Has easy access to materials, data
Is less expensive
Sympathetic to aims of project
More likely to consult colleagues, families, and to share information

drawbacks

Perhaps less objective and more likely to be influenced by colleagues
Has less time
May not have necessary skills
May be biased towards certain aspects of the work
Perhaps reluctant to be sufficiently critical
May create internal conflicts

Someone from outside

advantages

May be free from internal bias
Provides a fresh perspective
Can often spend more focused time
May bring new insights, ideas or skills
May resolve internal conflicts by acting as a neutral party

drawbacks

May not understand, or have sympathy with, aims of project
May impose inappropriate criteria
May address external agenda rather than actual needs or timetable of project
Likely to be more expensive
Could be uncommitted to project's future
May not consult adequately, or at all

These choices are often resolved by circumstances and by personalities. They also depend crucially on the nature of the project itself, and its resources. A small pilot scheme may not require an elaborate external evaluation, while a project which hopes to influence government policy and 'go to scale' may, on the other hand, benefit from external and independent assessment.

There are no hard and fast rules, but a few points of principle on some fundamental issues are worth highlighting, especially where an external evaluator is involved.

Control

Whatever your decision – and many projects share the work between staff and an external evaluator – a project should retain control of, and involvement in, its own evaluation. This is not the same as controlling the content of reports. What it actually means is that a project needs to feel confident that the process of evaluation, as well as its outcomes, has been fully shared; and that it has addressed the right issues and considered all the available evidence.

At the end of an evaluation, the staff ought to be able to say: 'We don't necessarily agree with all that the report says, but we think it is fair, and everyone has had a chance to comment – and has been listened to.'

If, on the other hand, a project feels that the evaluation is not reflecting the true nature of its work, is not representing the facts, or is being used in a way that is not in the project's own interests, it must have the power to either remedy the situation or bring the process to a halt.

> Projects should never entirely hand over the evaluation to an outside agency.

Project involvement

Even where an external evaluator is employed, the project team needs to be involved in the task. It may decide, with the evaluator, to undertake some of the work itself (like a survey of families, for example); it may feel that certain issues are too sensitive to be explored; it may want to delegate some of the work to people in the community

EVALUATION EXERCISE
SO THERE THEY GO! THE PROJECT IS OVER... IT WAS GOOD HAVING THEM HERE!
YES! THEY HAD LOTS OF GOOD IDEAS...
AND SOME CRAZY ONES!
BUT THE BULLIES GOT FIXED! ...AS DID THE PUT DOWN TREES
AND HOW THEY CARVED PLANTED!
SIGH!
IT WAS GOOD FOR THE CHILDREN... ALL THOSE STORIES OF PARADISE PLACES!
AND THE BOOKS THEY LEFT!
...AND ALL THE VISITORS, AND THE PARTYING!
I LIKED THOSE, BUT SHOULD NEED MORE THAN TALKING AND FEASTING!
BUT, WHAT REAL DIFFERENCE DID IT MAKE? ... THEY'RE STILL SICK! ... THE CHILD IS STILL GROWING, OH?
YOU'RE SO BACKWARD! OUR VILLAGE HAS MADE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT!
BASED UPON OUR HELP AND ADVICE THERE ARE MANY NEW BOOKS, REPORTS, DIPLOMAS, PAPERS AND SURVEYS IN THE LIBRARIES AND DATA-BANKS!
AND, THANKS TO OUR VILLAGE, THERE ARE NOW 23 NEW PH.D.'S AND [illegible] NEW PILLS ON THE MARKET!
AH!

whom it knows and trusts; it may want to involve other external experts or advisers; or it may simply want the evaluator to share problems and outcomes with staff and, on a more formal level, with its committee, board or advisory group.

> No evaluation should impose, or interfere with the work of projects, or intrude into the lives of families. Projects are not 'laboratories'.

Regular consultation

Whoever is responsible for the evaluation, the project team needs to be consulted regularly about progress. It needs to see drafts of reports and have the time to discuss these fully, not only among staff but with parents and volunteers. They need to be able to comment in the knowledge that those comments will be taken seriously. If a university student is doing the work

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under supervision, projects need to meet with that student's supervisor regularly to ensure that the quality of the work is being monitored properly.

Independence

We have stressed that the interests of projects need to be safeguarded. But projects also have responsibilities, and a major one is to ensure that the evaluation enjoys its own independence. That, after all, is its main attraction. Projects cannot dictate an evaluator's findings. Often these are matters of personal interpretation (Is a glass half full or half empty?) So it must be made clear at the outset where the project's boundaries lie.

An example:

An evaluation of the work of a number of voluntary agencies – many of them holding conflicting views about the scope and nature of the evaluation – was undertaken by an external evaluator. She agreed that all drafts of reports should first be seen by the agencies, and that their comments should be taken into account in producing the final report.

But matters of interpretation remained irreconcilable. Where these arose, she therefore added footnotes, indicating where the differences occurred, giving both views and allowing the reader to be the final judge.

It actually improved the quality of the final report.

A matter of confidence

Many of the potential difficulties and conflicts between projects and evaluators come down, in the end, to a matter of confidence. It is one of the first tasks of an evaluator to win that confidence from the project, as well as from those involved with it.

Integrity, accessibility and honesty — these, no less than technical expertise, are the essential characteristics of a good evaluator.

7 What will you look at?

Many projects want to evaluate *everything*. That is clearly impossible, and often also counter-productive, because it can mean that the really important elements of a project are treated superficially, while inessential aspects are given undue weight.

Developing evaluation 'targets' is probably the most crucial, and also one of the most difficult, stages of the whole process. We are going to presume that the earlier discussions about the nature of the project – its specific aims – has clarified the objectives. But now we need to *operationalise* these, and we have to determine our *parameters*. That is, we have to turn the objectives into a set of observable and measurable outcomes, and we then have to decide what we will use as yardsticks.

Let's look at an example.

Your project is concerned with the problem of teenage pregnancy and works with adolescents through clinics and in schools. You now want to evaluate this project and the impact it may be having on the young people. In order to do that, you need to be very clear who the target group is and what the objectives are. Is the project about stopping young girls getting pregnant by, for instance, providing them with contraceptives and counselling? Is it about changing adolescents' attitudes? Is it about increasing their knowledge? Is it about reducing their sexual activity?

Perhaps it is about all these things. But the most important issue of all has not been mentioned. Is the project actually reaching *all* of the target group, or is it missing out on a vulnerable minority (or even majority) of 'hard-to-reach' youngsters? If so, how valid will your results be?

Let's turn the situation around, and sketch out a hypothesis for the project. What is it claiming and what, as a result, should the evaluation illuminate? In this case, it hopes to claim that fewer young girls are becoming pregnant and, as well, *that this is the result of the programme*. The implication is that the project has

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actually changed the attitudes, as well as the behaviour, of the youngsters.

This focuses attention on two separate but related issues where you have to take decisions.

- How to define the term 'fewer' when referring to the target population. Would one or two less satisfy you? No! You are looking for a 'significant' reduction, and the level of that significance will depend on your sample size, as well as its composition.

- Given that you can agree there has been a significant reduction, you then need to find ways in which to explain how this may have come about. You may draw samples from the population and question them. You may want to compare girls who *did* become pregnant with those who did *not*; or girls and boys who *were* in the programme with those who were out of it.

> A project can seem highly successful without achieving a positive outcome of its hypothesis. It may be popular. It may get additional funding. Its materials may be in great demand. Yet it may still have great difficulty in showing that its approach is effective.

Notice that you are beginning to contemplate an evaluation that uses two different types of information: *quantitative* and *qualitative*. Both are important, but they provide rather different kinds of knowledge. What's the difference?

> *Quantitative data* is about enumeration. It deals with numbers (or statistics) and gives us overall amounts. As a result, we can make broad generalisations (if the numbers are large enough); we can compare sets of numbers (enrolments in different centres, for example); we can look at the distribution of the numbers and perform a series of tests which can tell us whether, for instance, the distributions are comparable or whether differences between them are significant.
>
> *Qualitative data* is about personal perceptions. It may consist of written records, recorded conversations (either on paper or on tape), field notes or even sketches. In

particular, it includes 'open-ended' sections of questionnaires or comments and views written on check-lists, letters and the minutes of meetings. Unlike quantitative data, we cannot perform arithmetic operations on this type of information, without first 'converting' the data into quantitative form. But it tells us about individual reactions, feelings, impressions and processes and is therefore invaluable in all evaluations involving social interactions.

Because we are anxious to show that any improvements we can quantify are the result of the project's intervention and not an outcome of some other cause, it is important that the evaluation also looks at children and families *not* involved in the programme. In other words, that there are one or more 'comparison groups' in the study. This phrase is used here in place of the laboratory term 'control groups' because people, unlike specially-bred rats, will always differ from one another in many significant ways that cannot be controlled.

Because people differ, they will react differently to programmes. So look out for, and value, unexpected outcomes! 'Spin-offs' – results which were unpredictable and not part of the intended outcomes – should influence an evaluation.

Now that we are beginning to build up the strategy for our evaluation, and seeing what kinds of data we may need, it is also worth setting out the main evaluation plan, and to ask how long this may all take to do.

8 How long will it take and how much will it cost?

We have already stressed that the evaluation process begins either before, or at the same time, as the project itself. As soon as you begin to reflect on the aims of your project, you are also – although perhaps not consciously – considering its evaluation.

Not all projects require elaborate evaluations. Some may need no more than monitoring. In general, the scope of the evaluation programme should be in proportion to the scale of the project itself. It is quality, not quantity, that counts.

It is essential to be realistic when drawing up a timetable for an evaluation workplan. Even professional researchers make serious mistakes in predicting how long various tasks will take. People tend to be over-optimistic in assessing their schedules.

It usually takes longer than you think to collect data. If you are going to develop your own ways of collecting information, then you must allow time for field-testing. If you are going to use questionnaires, then you may need to have them printed. If you are going to visit families in a rural area, then you need the time to move from site to site. If you are going to test children in schools, you need to get permission from the authorities to do so. It all takes time.

You also need time to *process the data*: to code it, organise it and possibly enter it into computer or paper files. If you are

working with a large sample, think about how much work is involved – and who is going to do it.

The analysis and report-writing – some of which will have to be done after the project has ended – also need time. Final reports on evaluations usually take between six and nine months after a project has ended, or after the last data has been collected.

Moreover, if your project is concerned to show the *impact* of your work – for example, on children's progress in school, or changing family attitudes, or the effect on the environment – you may need to collect additional data after the project has finished.

Be realistic! It is not much help suggesting that the outcomes will not be seen for a generation!

This all suggests that, when you are preparing your initial project proposal, you should consider a separate and independent time-scale for the evaluation. Before the project begins, you may need to do a *needs assessment*, a survey of the community to find out the most urgent requirements of people in the area. After the project has ended, you will certainly need some more time to complete the evaluation.

For too many projects, the evaluation stops when the project ends. The result is that a lot of 'impact' data is lost, because nobody was around to pick up the vital information, or to report on it.

Sponsors want to know about those outcomes. They are as anxious as you to report the effectiveness of your approach, your programme, and to learn from it. That is why they funded you in the first place.

But evaluation is a labour-intensive activity. It needs people and time and is not something that can be done on the kitchen table in a week after a project has finished. Allow for 'slippage' – the unexpected that always seems to happen: the computer breaks down; schools go on holiday; a flood stops you visiting the villages; the car falls to pieces; the field staff are ill.

By this time, you may have decided to use an external evaluator! But if you employ an outside agency, the costs may well be higher. It will almost certainly involve overheads, which

can sometimes add up to 40 per cent of the salary costs, and it may well include all sorts of 'extras', such as secretarial support, computer time, equipment, accomodation and administration fees.

If, however, an outside estimate for doing the evaluation seems very modest, then look particularly at how many weeks, days or hours the evaluator intends to spend on the work and familiarising him or herself with your project. Is it realistic? Can a good study really be undertaken on such a tight budget? Or does the evaluator expect you and your staff to do most of the work anyway?

Hiring an outside agency to undertake the evaluation does not necessarily mean less work for the project. It may mean more!

Look, as well, at the costs of doing it yourself. It may, of course, mean that you do not have to make any direct payments to an external agency, but it will certainly mean that at least one of your staff will be spending a great deal of time doing the work instead – and that means money too!

9 What measures should you use?

The difference between an 'evaluation' and a 'report' is that the first is based, almost exclusively, on collected and analysed data – on observed facts, if you like – whereas the second can often be almost a personal account.

The strength of the evaluation therefore depends to a large extent on the *relevance*, the *quality*, the *extent* and the subsequent *analysis* of the data itself. This is another measure of what makes evaluation 'scientific'. Therefore the methods used to collect information, or data, are critical to the whole exercise.

At this point, let us assume that you have agreed what you want to evaluate and that you now need to work out how to go about the actual work. This is sometimes referred to as 'armchair research'. What needs to be done next? What do you now need in order to proceed? What data do you need to collect? What tools do you need to develop? What is already available? When are you going to collect it? Who is going to do the work? Even more critically, who is going to be available to do the *data reduction*, taking all the raw data and preparing it for analysis? Talk your way through the entire process, noticing in particular 'bottlenecks' that will occur in the work, and looking constantly for key steps that you may have missed out in developing the evaluation.

In planning the evaluation programme, make sure your fieldwork does not clash with local or regional holidays or religious festivals. Here is an extract from a Nigerian study, which shows that sometimes, it can go very wrong!

> The field work period coincided with the Muslim fast of Ramadan. Since the majority of our sample was Muslim, it was difficult to find a convenient time which did not interfere with the altered schedules of work, rest and fast-breaking.
>
> Women have more cumbersome food preparation responsibilities during the fasting period, and may also have reduced energy due to the variation in feeding patterns. Interviews often had to be interrupted due to the time demands of these farmers' wives.'
>
> (Source: Wilson-Oyelaran, E.B. and Ladipo, P. (1987) *Child care and development: a baseline survey of rural areas in Oyo local government*. Ile-Ife, Nigeria: UNICEF/Obafemi Awolowo University

If you are going to interview people, you will need to develop an *interview schedule*. You aim to get the same kind of information from all those you talk to. That means thinking about what you really want to know, preparing a *pilot schedule* and trying it out on a small group beforehand (*not* the same group whom you will be including in your main sample), making changes and revising the schedule – all before you actually undertake your fieldwork.

Remember that developing instruments can be a very time-consuming and difficult process. It is particularly important that you conduct *field trials* or *pilots* with anything you produce, because no matter how experienced you may be in this area, nobody gets it right first time!

This is particularly true of *questionnaires*. You may know exactly what it is you want to ask, but do people reading it understand this in the same way? You will be surprised how even your most direct, unambiguous questions cause problems.

Here is a recent example from a Jamaican study.

> The project wanted to know whether young people who had been on a counselling programme had benefitted from the experience. So the evaluators offered them a number of choices, such as 'I am ready to be a parent', and then asked the students: 'Does this describe me?' or 'Is this different from me?' These categories caused great confusion, especially the last one. Later it was changed, to 'Not like me' but by that time, most of the data had already been collected. (*Evaluation of Counselling Programme* [1990] Kingston, Jamaica: Teenage Mothers project.)

Asking difficult or obscure questions is one problem. Asking obvious ones causes different reactions. People get understandably annoyed if they are asked to state the obvious. Here is another recent example.

> One of the group looked rather disparagingly at the questionnaire. 'There's not much point in asking whether we enjoyed the course and found it useful, because if we didn't we

> wouldn't have kept coming, and we all did!' (*Report on Phase 1* [1990] Aberdeen, UK: Young Families Now project)

Always consider the purpose of a question. Is it really helpful to ask whether, as in the example above, a course has been 'enjoyable' or 'useful'? You might have enjoyed it because you met other people, or it offered you the chance to visit another town or to get away from work!

Questionnaire design requires particular skills and contains many pitfalls. Here is just one common example.

You want to know from mothers how old their children are. So in your questionnaire you carefully provide a section which asks:

> How many of your children are aged:
>
> 0 - 1: ❑
> 1 - 2: ❑
> 2 - 3: ❑

My child is two years old. In which box should I put my number?

There is another variation, which looks like this:

> How many of your children are aged:
>
> 1: ❑
> 2: ❑
> 3: ❑

If a child is 2 years 11 months, that is considerably older, in developmental terms, than a child aged 2.1 years. So does the data, as gathered here, give enough *relevant* information about the children coming to the centre, if the focus of your study is on the pre-school children?

A simpler and quicker form of questionnaire is the *check list*, which simply poses a limited number of very general questions, and requires a cross or a tick in a series of boxes. When you ask people to complete questionnaires in their own words, you may come up against the problem that some do not like putting their

feelings into words (or may be nervous about doing so). A second difficulty is how you use the data you have collected.

There are, however, many other sources of data which may be appropriate to your evaluation. Here are just a few suggestions.

Diaries

Individual records of people's day-to-day perceptions of a project, as it develops, are invaluable sources of information. Diaries which set out their actual daily work routines are also extremely helpful, but they need to be designed so that people can keep them up-to-date easily.

Work schedules

Asking staff to keep records of how they spend their time over a given period – say a week – can be useful in developing a 'profile' of a project, or a particular task within a project. Equally, if completed by families, it can reveal areas where support is needed.

Case studies

By 'case studies' we mean detailed histories or stories of a particular event, or centre or campaign. Particularly relevant here are individual family histories which give some indication of the impact of a project – as well as other external influences – that impinge on the life of a child or a family. It is not, of course, that these studies represent the experience of the entire community, but they help to illustrate the complexities and diversities of impact to be found within that project.

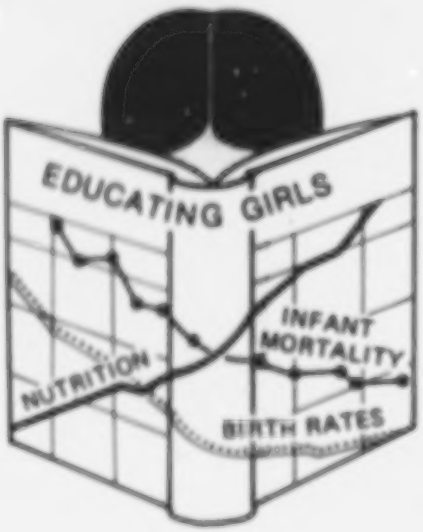
Family networks

In a Western context, it is often useful to try to find out who within families relates to whom – in technical jargon, the 'extent of the family network'. If treated as a game, it can become a very fascinating undertaking. Ask people questions such as: 'Who do you see every day? Every week? At least once a month? Who is your best friend? Who do you confide in?' Then sketch out the resulting information into a *network*. Again, there are problems. It is often the case, for example, that when people are asked questions like this, they 'forget' to mention their very closest associates, like wives, husbands, partners.

mothers, grandmother . . . When reminded of this, they may very well say: 'Oh well, I wasn't counting *them*!'

Observations

Simply observing and recording what children and parents do together, and how many times certain events occur, and in what circumstances, over a prescribed period of time and in a specific setting, can help illustrate what is actually going on in a community. But constructing an *observation schedule* is difficult and time-consuming, and demands that you know how you are going to interpret, or *score*, the observations.



The picture shows that there is a connection between the education of girls and the health and growth of children. When girls are educated infant death rates fall, child nutrition improves, birth rates fall. The message is: 'better education for girls improves child health and child spacing'.

Records

There are often records or written material which can provide useful information: school reports, health indicators, reports of meetings, financial statements, or other documentation which has been gathered and assembled by other people. You don't *have* to do all the work yourself! But always ask yourself: 'How accurate is it? How was the information collected, and when was it checked?'

Statistics

Figures have their place as long as they have a story to tell. Usually they will address questions such as 'how many' or 'how often'. From these figures, you will want to draw up tables giving *distribution frequencies* – that is,

showing the 'spread' of the responses. One useful, clear and sometimes dramatic way of doing this is by using *graphs*.

Whatever way you gather your data, always explain what you did, and discuss both the strengths and weaknesses of your choice.

Tests

Do not rely on published tests. Most of these have been developed in the West, and have been checked (if at all) on sometimes quite small samples of white children. The items are often not applicable to communities in other cultures and often contain assumptions and biases that may severely distort your results. It is often better to construct your own, very simple, criteria for performance which make allowances for local conditions.

Earlier we said that good evaluation depends on four characteristics of your data: *relevance, quality, extent* and *analysis*. What does that mean?

Relevance

The data you collect should have a direct bearing on the questions you want to address. Don't ask irrelevant questions – people can quickly spot when you are wasting their time. Always ask yourself: 'why am I asking this question, and how am I going to use the information?'

Quality

This relates to the degree to which you feel the information is accurate. If you are interested in children's diet, for example, asking parents what their children had to eat 'the previous day' can be very imprecise – people whose diet varies very much cannot remember! But if you *watch* children having a meal in their own homes, and record what they actually eat, you may feel much more confident about your results.

Extent

This relates, in part, to *sample sizes*. Your project may reach hundreds of children and families, or only dozens. If you only have small numbers, then the way you analyse the data will be very different to the way you would handle information about a large group, and perhaps you should focus on individual studies, rather than group studies. If you want to compare small groups of children in different centres, for example, you will need to ensure that you have enough boys and girls in each centre to make meaningful comparisons. Remember: small studies can be as valuable as large ones, they may just provide rather different types of information.

Broadly speaking, small and intensive studies of a group of families provide *fine-grained* but particular observations; large studies produce *coarse-grained*, but more generalisable findings.

Analysis

Collecting data is one thing; making sense of it is quite another. But while it is easy to point out some fairly simple traps or to offer some useful tips, it is virtually impossible to offer general guidance on what, after all, is *your* data. Conducting good analysis on data is a bit like writing a novel – a creative act!

Let us look at a few features of that act, and see if there is anything we can, in general, learn about it.

10 Analysing the data

This is the stage where you try to 'make the data speak for itself.'

Although we have separated out the process of analysis from that of writing up the study, this is an artificial division. The two are part of one overall function: to tell the story of the evaluation, in as clear and convincing a way as possible.

Let us assume that you have already completed the process of *data reduction* (that all the data has been scored and entered into appropriate tabulations); that all your interviews have been transcribed and edited; that your questionnaires have been coded and turned into tables; that you have taken the relevant material from the reports and notes of committee meetings; that you have read and extracted passages from any relevant papers; that all the raw material you need to tell your 'story' is at hand, in a form that you can use.

For the first time, you may be ready to make some definitions. What *is* the average age of the children coming to the centre? Where *do* the families live? How many of them *are* involved in the programme? What *is* it that they say they find most rewarding about your project?

> The most important aspect of data, and often the most ignored, is to *look at it*. Question it. Ask yourself: 'Why did it come out like this?' Or: 'Is this obvious?'

But don't be content just with *describing* or *reporting* your data. If, for example, you have calculated the average age of your children, do not forget to look at the *range* of the ages and how many fall below the average, as well as how many are above. Are there, perhaps, different groups, one composed of older children and one of younger? Remember that *measures of central tendency*, like averages, while useful, often mask much more interesting features.

If you are going to put some of these statistics in a table, remember to give the numbers involved as well as percentages. To claim that attendance has 'increased by 50 per cent' may mean that one more child has joined the group!

A set of statistics can often reveal its true content through the use of graphs, which may reveal trends.

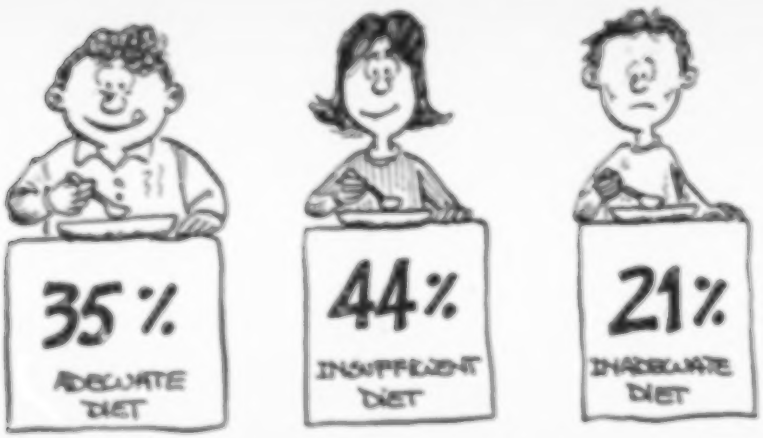
Make the data work for you. Organise it so that it enables you to build up an argument. Pick out the really significant pieces of your data (*why*, incidently, *are* these significant?) and see if you can strengthen your case with other data.

Pretend you are presenting the Case for the Prosecution in a court of law, to a jury who knows nothing about this project. What evidence are you going to bring before it that will convince the jury to vote in your favour?

And don't forget, there is always *a* Case for the Defence! So consider alternative explanations for your data, and then present reasoned arguments why you prefer your own interpretation of the facts.

That, after all, is what data analysis is all about: organising your evidence in a logical, well-argued case, while recognising that there are always other explanations which could use the same material and make a completely different case. What you have to do is to maximise the probability that your interpretation is the right one, and minimise the possibility that other explanations are just as good and just as likely.

There is a natural tendency – but a very mistaken one – to assume a direct relationship between a programme and some measured outcomes. From there, it is only a step towards suggesting that the one 'caused' the other.



QUALITY OF THE DIET

If, however, you ask parents about how certain outcomes occurred, you may get a very different picture. Again, if you speak to staff or professionals or service agencies, they will probably interpret your findings in yet another way, or bring up other reasons why certain outcomes were obtained.

Because many other influences unrelated to your project affect the community, it is normally unlikely that a project will have an immediate and direct measurable effect which can only be explained in terms of your programme. Rather, the project will be part of a more complex pattern of events. That is to say, rather than a direct link ('We did this and, because of it, that happened') we are nearly always concerned with a more complicated relationship ('We did this, and at the same time all these other things were going on, which in turn led to some people getting together and deciding to …).

Because of such complicated links, it is usually unwise to rely on single sources of data (a survey of parents, for example) or even on only one type of data (a set of questionnaires, or interviews, or test scores).

Instead, try to use different types of data to focus on one aspect of your outcomes, illuminating different aspects of it. Apart from strengthening your arguments, it is often a good way of

maximising the quality of your data. If, for example, you have statements from teachers that certain children are doing 'well' at school, is there any other information which could confirm those opinions? Do the parents agree?

A common flaw of many evaluations is that they present a well-reasoned argument for a certain hypothesis, which the evaluation strongly asserts to be the case, but that the actual data does not support the argument being presented. Sometimes it actually contradicts it!

Make sure your argument accords with your facts!
And make sure your facts support your argument!

No evaluation is finished until a report containing the results exists. Without that, all the work remains incomplete.

No matter how interesting your data, or how strong your argument, or how acute your observations, or how large your sample, all these remain of merely potential value unless others can know about them, consider the evidence for themselves, and reflect on your work.

An evaluation report must allow a busy reader to do this, without wading through a lengthy blow-by-blow account. Basically, that reader is looking for four outputs.

1 A list of 'major findings'. What, given all your work, has the evaluation actually uncovered? What ideas has it produced? What does the evidence point to? What are the hypotheses that have been thrown up by the data?

By setting these out clearly, and by cross-referencing them to the relevant evidence and discussion in the text, you can provide your audience with a quick guide through the main features of your report.

2 A list of 'implications'. If you are right about your findings, what does this mean for policy makers, practitioners, professionals and, above all, the project. Can you say anything to them as a result of this work? (And the standard conclusion – more research is needed – is distinctly unhelpful!)

By guiding the reader to those parts of the text where your evidence is presented, you will indicate that these 'implications' are not mere conjectures on your part, but arise out of the study.

3 A clear description of what you did, and how you went about it. This must include a description of the project itself; of the hypotheses you derived; of the instruments you used; of the sample you chose; of the data reduction you undertook.

4 The fourth, and more general, requirement that the reader looks for is *competence*. Judged on the evidence produced, can we have confidence in the findings and the implications? Should the findings be taken seriously, and

do the implications genuinely arise out of the study? How convincing is the argument?

The answers will depend on how the evaluation was conducted as well as on your own assessment of its value. So a section on 'reflections', or a commentary on what you see as the particular strengths of the study, as well as its weaknesses, will help the reader to gauge his or her own reactions to the evidence.

There are a number of strategies which are useful to reduce your workload in producing such a report. One is to sub-divide the evaluation into a series of self-contained sections, which can be written at different times and which will report on aspects of the evaluation.

Breaking down the reporting in this way has many benefits: it makes the task more manageable; it focuses the mind of the reader on one issue at a time, rather than having to take everything into account at once; and for the evaluator, it ensures that certain parts of the study are out of the way so that full attention can be given to other important features.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

It has one other great merit. People are impatient to hear how your project is getting on. If they need to wait for three or four years before they learn about it, they may lose interest. (So might you!) So a series of shorter, more focused reports maintains that interest and enables you to keep your project 'on the boil'. You can always bundle these separate but related reports or studies together later to provide a single, complete document.

Another strategy some evaluators adopt is to produce a technical 'source book' – one overall document which contains all the material that arose out of the evaluation: copies of instruments, full transcriptions of interviews, complete records

of test scores, examples of questionnaires and check-lists, and tables arising out of the analysis.

Remember, however, never to identify individual children or families, or to give such detailed descriptions of people that all those living in the area will immediately know to whom you refer. If you need to use names, make these up (and say you have done so.) Especially when publishing case studies, check with those involved that nothing which may be published will in any way reflect badly on them.

The virtue of such a 'source book' is that it offers those who want to consult the details of your work the chance to do so, and allows you, in turn, to refer back to your own material. For any project, this is a valuable document, especially as other evaluations may be undertaken in the future and it is often notoriously difficult to remember precisely how an initial study was undertaken.

Do not rush into print! A good evaluator always checks the draft of the reports with the project first. Everyone, from staff to parents to professionals, should have the right to comment *before* the report is completed.

Another approach which is very helpful to an evaluation is to organise discussion groups focused on the draft report. In this way, staff and the community can ask questions, query the results, and debate the interpretation of the facts. Almost inevitably this leads to an improved final product. But it also allows others to feel that they have a stake in the evaluation and to be confident that it truly reflects their project.

This is vitally important because the project, armed with its evaluation, is now in a position to produce a whole series of publications aimed at different audiences. It may want to organise a conference; it may want to broadcast the findings to policy makers; it may wish to report the results in the press. It will certainly need to communicate with sponsors.

So, as another strategy, and depending on the resources available, you may want to import other skills in order to convey the 'story' of your evaluation to a wider public – journalistic, linguistic, public relations, publishing – and to pursue the advocacy that the project wishes to promote.

The message, inevitably, has to be simple, direct and clear. But a word of warning! In simplifying your results and broadcasting them, make sure that your findings are not misinterpreted, your evidence is misread or misunderstood, or your carefully-worded conclusions distorted.

Evaluation is not the same as public relations.

So check what others write, how they make use of your data, and ensure that the results of your work are reported correctly. Long after the article or the leaflet was published, you will be left with the repercussions.

As always, the project must control the use of the evaluation, what is published in its name, how it is presented, and what claims are actually made.

12 Some useful resources

There is an extensive literature on all aspects of evaluation, but most of it is of a highly technical nature, aimed principally at academics or professional researchers.

Recently, however, there have been a number of attempts to produce materials which are of more direct use to field workers and project staff. The following selection is drawn from a wide field, and chosen to meet a variety of needs. Readability and relevance, rather than comprehensiveness, have been the criteria. Wherever possible, we give the original source, but no guarantee can be given about availability.

First, however, you should meet the Reasonable Social Scientist, who lives on the 32nd floor of the United Nations Plaza and is the barely-fictitious character of Howard Richards' innovative study on a community development project in Chile, the *Programa Padres e Hijos* (Parents and Children Program):

- *The Evaluation of Cultural Action* (1985)
  Richards, Howard
  The Macmillan Press
  London, UK

The foreword by Malcolm Parlett makes the point: 'Here is an evaluation that can be read without experiencing tedium, that stimulates us to think hard about the very basis of what constitutes evaluation of a program, that is genuinely informative about what the program is like, and which is at the same time also entertaining.'

Parlett's own contribution to what he has described as 'an attack on a research tradition that grips most of the evaluation activity in the world today, despite inadequacies of logic and methodology' is contained in a still important paper:

- *Evaluation as Illumination: a new Approach to the Study of Innovating Programs* (1974)
  Parlett, M. and Hamilton, D.
  Occasional Paper No. 9
  Centre for Research in the Educational Sciences
  University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

There is, incidently, a good discussion of Howard Richards' study, by a South American, Beatrice Avalos, in:

- *Research, Co-operation and Evaluation of Educational Programmes in the Third World* (1985)
  Watson, Keith and Osenham, John (eds)
  Pergamon Press,
  Oxford, U.K.

This collection of essays, while focusing on 'educational research' rather than evaluation, and addressing the issues at a more general, abstract level, nevertheless contains much of interest to evaluators in developing countries – as well as some useful bibliographies.

You should also try to meet the 'participant observer' in:

- *Listen to the People* (1987)
  Participant-Observer Evaluation of Development Projects
  Salmen, Lawrence F.
  Published for the World Bank
  Oxford University Press, U.K.

Although not directly related to the material of this publication, Salmen's observations for the World Bank in La Paz, Bolivia and Guayaquil, Ecuador are full of insights about what a keen eye and listening ear can pick up. As he himself wrote:

> 'The premise of this book is that there is a way to learn about people undergoing development that may provoke direct and immediate benefits to them ... Intense observation revealed that many people simply do not understand the nature of the projects intended to benefit them. Often there are established local interests ... whose influence on the beneficiaries has been ignored or underestimated. Project components are often viewed out of context, as isolated abstractions in and of themselves rather than as interventions affecting people who have unique histories, locations and cultures.'

One of the most appropriate guides for field projects, and one that is based on extensive international experience, is:

- *Partners in Evaluation* (1986)
  Evaluating Development and Community Programmes with Participants
  Feuerstein, Marie-Thérèse
  Macmillan Education, London, U.K.

The text is full of lively, local examples drawn from many countries, and illustrated with some delightful graphs, charts and drawings. It is published in conjunction with Teaching Aids at Low Cost (TALC), P.O.Box 49, St. Albans, Hertfordshire UK which makes low-cost editions available with the support of the Swedish International Development Authority.

- *Evaluating Family Programs* (1988)
  Weiss, Heather B. and Jacobs, Francine H. (eds.)
  Aldine de Gruyter, New York, USA

In Part Three of this much-praised and very readable volume, there are ten chapters on 'Evaluation Experiences'. According to one reviewer, these were 'the most enlightening, and fun to read.' The nice thing about them is that they present a discussion about the problems facing evaluators, drawn from their own experience, and how they overcame them – or tried to. 'They should comfort those who discover little convergence between the classic textbook example or the glossy description of one's methodology in a research article and the day-to-day experiences of conducting research,' said the reviewer.

- *Evaluating Your Adolescent Pregnancy Program: How to Get Started* (1989)
  Philliber, Susan
  Philliber Research Associates
  145 Lucas Avenue
  Accord, NY 12404, USA

Although this 20-page guide is directed specifically at teenage pregnancy programmes – and is, of course, set in the US context – it is written in an easy, non-technical language and deals with many of the issues in this *Introduction*.

It describes different types of evaluation – needs assessments, process evaluation and outcome and impact evaluation; it discusses different questions that projects might ask about the outcomes of their work, and it offers some good tips. Here is a sample:

> 'Use verbs that are clear and strong. Avoid using words such as *enhance*, *promote* or *encourage*. Evaluators who measure concrete achievements are unable to understand what program directors mean by such terms, or how to measure whether they happened. Instead, write that you will *increase*, *decrease*, *meet*, *write* or *hold*.'

How to Get Started also includes a helpful section on resources: other US guides, reports and sourcebooks on evaluation. Most of these are, however, concerned specifically with teenage pregnancy and parenting programmes.

- *Evaluation in the Voluntary Sector* (1988)
  Ball, Mog
  The Forbes Trust
  Forbes House
  9 Artillery Lane
  London E1 7LP, UK

Although this 70-page report is largely directed at UK organisations wanting to undertake their own evaluations, it contains a number of unique features, of which perhaps the most interesting is a series of case studies of real-life evaluations. In fact, the study of which it is the outcome looked at some 3,000 case studies, and hence provides plenty of illustrations of 'evaluation in action' (in the UK context). There is also a wallchart, published by the Forbes Trust, called 'How Good a Job are you Doing?' which summarises the report. The chart is currently available from: The Librarian, Barnados, Tanners Lane, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex IG6 1QG, UK.

Both report and chart are written in a non-technical, easy-to-read style, not aimed at specialists but rather at people who, though they may not have experience of conducting evaluations, feel that they should learn more about it. It opens:

> 'Evaluation begins and ends with knowledge. Before a judgement can be made about a particular organisation or service, some knowledge of what it does is essential. Judgement needs evidence. Once that evidence has been collected and analysed, it is possible to make conclusions so that a new level of knowledge is reached. So, in theory, through evaluation we can learn from experience.'

A useful mixture of case material and discussion is contained in:

- *Questioning Practice: NGOs and Evaluation* (1985)
  Porter, Douglas and Clark, Kevin
  Pacific Aid Research Project Monograph No. 1
  New Zealand Coalition for Trade and Development,
  Wellington, New Zealand

Although is is directed at organisations which are involved in aid programmes within the Pacific region, its approach is more general and reflects an attitude towards evaluation which is very much in line with this publication. For instance:

> 'Evaluation should be viewed as a dialogue over time, and not as a static picture at one point in time.'

As part of the European Commission's Programme to Combat Poverty, the evaluators have produced a useful working paper called:

- *A 'Good Practice' Guide to Self-Evaluation*
  Whitting, Gill
  Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy
  University of Bath, Bath, UK

Together with a number of examples from field projects throughout the EC, this brief (34 pages) guide – given its specific focus – offers some good advice. For instance: 'The most important reason why an action-research project should engage in self-evaluation is to aid its own management and development.'

UNICEF has recently produced its own guide, principally for its field staff. It is called:

- *Making a Difference?* (1991)
  A UNICEF Guide for Monitoring and Evaluation
  Evaluation Office,
  UNICEF
  3 United Nations Plaza
  New York, NY 10017, USA

Although principally directed at the needs of field officers, it covers much the same ground as this publication, though it focuses more on the management than the execution of evaluation. UNICEF also publishes a regular Evaluation Newsletter.

It is unusual for a funding agency to produce its own evaluation guide. Recently the Saint Paul Foundation in Minnesota, USA commissioned a guide for its own grant recipients. Brief and to the point, it is a readable text of 36 pages, which also includes information on how to calculate a reasonable sample size. It is available, free, from:

- *Evaluating Foundation Programs & Projects*
  Minnesota Curriculum Services Center
  Capitol View, 70 Co.Road. B-2W
  Little Canada, Minn. 55117, USA

Another funding agency which has recently brought out guidelines on evaluation is the W.K.Kellog Foundation, in Michigan, USA.

- *Program of Evaluation*
  W.K. Kellog Foundation
  400 North Avenue
  Battle Creek, Michigan 49017-3398, USA

Principally directed at its own grant-holders, this seven-page statement by a major US funder emphasises the need not only for individual project evaluation, but also for what it describes as 'cluster evaluation' based on a thematic approach; a strategy also adopted by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

For those who want to dig deeper and get to grips with some of the technical detail involved in evaluation, a useful combination is:

- *Evaluation: a systematic approach* (Third Edition, 1985)
  Rossi, Peter H. and Freeman, Howard E.
  Sage Publications, 275 Beverley Drive
  Beverley Hills, CA 90212, USA

- *Workbook for Evaluation: a systematic approach* (Third Edition, 1986)
  Sandefur, Gary D., Freeman, Howard E. and
  Rossi, Peter H.
  Sage Publications, 275 Beverley Drive
  Beverley Hills, CA 90212, USA

Arising out of a UNESCO meeting on evaluation in the mid-1970s, and with subsequent OECD support, this is a 422-page textbook (with an accompanying 92-page workbook) which is comprehensive and yet comprehensible. Although it leans heavily towards quantitative studies – there is virtually nothing on qualitative data or its analysis – it is enlivened by a large series of case study examples and is written in a reasonably light style.

Questionnaires

* *Using Questionnaires in Small-Scale Research: a teachers' guide* (1990)
  Munn, Pamela and Drever, Eric
  The Scottish Council for Research in Education
  15 St. John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR, UK

In 66 pages this little pocket book takes you, in very simple non-technical language, from reasons why you might want to use this type of instrument, through the issue of sampling, to analysing the results and presenting your conclusions. Note that it focuses on *postal* questionnaires, and that it is primarily aimed at UK teachers conducting their own school-based enquiries. Despite these restrictions, it is an excellent little guide, often providng very good reasons for *not* using questionnaires. It also carries an amount of good advice, such as: 'Not all research suggests changes are needed. Remember the old American folk saying: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"'

* *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardised Questionnaire* (1986)
  Converse, Jean M. and Presser, Stanley
  Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences
  Sage University Papers series
  Sage Publications, 275 Beverley Drive,
  Beverley Hills, CA 90212, USA

In many ways, this little (80 page) monograph is complementary to the UK guide, because it focuses particularly on questionnaires to be used in face-to-face interviews. As it says, 'It is unrewarding to be told that writing questions is simply an art. It is surely that, but there are also some guidelines that have emerged from the collective artistic experience and research tradition.' So it presents three chapters: on general strategies; on the research on how questions 'behave'; and on the actual task of developing instruments.

The series as a whole contains many titles of relevance to evaluators, some highly technical, others more general.

Case studies

* *Case Study Research: design and methods* (1984)
  Yin, Robert K.
  Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 5
  Sage Publications, 275 Beverley Drive,
  Beverley Hills, CA 90212, USA

There is very little literature on 'how to do' case studies, and this relatively short (159 pages) text is a good introduction. It is

simply written, though by no means easy-going, and is wholly based on US material. The basis of its argument is:

> 'A common complaint about case studies is that it is difficult to generalise from one case to another ... the problem lies in the very notion of generalising to other case studies. Instead, an analyst should try to generalise findings to "theory" ...'

Interviews

Howard Richards' book, which was mentioned earlier, also contains a number of relevant techniques, including ethnographic interviews. On identifying and making use of 'a good informant' the key text is:

- *The Ethnographic Interview* (1979)
  Spradley, J.P.
  Holt, Rinehart and Winston,
  New York, USA

Indicators

Two recent publications by Oxfam are also highly relevant. The first is a report of an international conference on evaluating social development projects in the Third World, and is particularly useful because it addresses the use of appropriate qualitative indicators, the changing nature of relationships between funders and recipients, and discusses the role of the evaluator.

- *Evaluating Social Development Projects*
  Marsden, David and Oakley, Peter (eds)
  Development Guidelines No.5
  Oxfam, 274 Banbury Road,
  Oxford, UK

Survey methods

The second is a more technical field guide to conducting social surveys, and was extensively field tested in the Sudan, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Available from the same Oxfam address, it is titled:

- *Social Survey Methods*
  Nichols, Paul
  Development Guidelines No.6

Databases

There are at least two major international databases, or information centres, of abstracts and listings of current and on-going studies and publications, which are of importance to evaluators.

- *ERIC* (Educational Resources Information Center)

.This 23-year-old system forms the world's largest source of education information (most of it from the USA and in English) and contains more than 650,000 documents on education research, practice and statistics. It is split up into 16 sections, each collated at a separate centre in the USA and each being responsible for collecting and distilling current, comprehensive information about a particular subject area. (For example, 'tests, measurement and evaluation' is housed at the American Institute for Research, District of Columbia while data on 'elementary and early childhood education', is stored at the University of Illinois.)

Basic information is provided on microfiche and on CD-ROM (compact disc), with an annual series of publications reviewing the material.

The central ERIC information centre is housed in the US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Washington DC 20208, USA

- *REDUC (Red de Información y Documentación en Educación para América Latina y el Caribe)*

As its title implies, this is an extensive information network (mostly in Spanish) on education for Latin America and the Caribbean. It involves 28 centres in 19 different countries throughout the region (including the USA and Canada), and the information is processed in a variety of ways. Analytic Abstracts on Education (RAE) are regular summaries on national as well as regional studies; indexes by authors and subject are produced regularly, and the original material is made available on microfiche.

Enquiries in the first instance should be directed to REDUC's co-ordinating centre within CIDE (Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación), Erasmo Escala No.1825, Casilla 13608, Santiago 1, Chile.

Latin America

There is an extensive literature on evaluation in Latin America. Two well-known texts that have been influenced by the evaluation of a Foundation-supported project based at the Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia are:

- *Estrategias de Evaluación de Programas Sociales* (1987)
  Abello Llanos, R. and Madariaga Orozco, C.
  Uninorte, Barranquilla, Colombia

- *Manual de Evaluacion de Atencion Integral al Niño* (1987)
  Amar Amar J. M and Gómez, G.
  Uninorte, Barranquilla, Colombia

How the evaluators developed their own thinking about approaching the evaluation of a complex 'empowering' project is graphically described in

- *The power to change: the experience of the Costa Atlántica project in Colombia, 1977-1989* (1990)
  Chetley, Andrew
  Bernard van Leer Foundation
  The Hague, The Netherlands

Statistics

Everyone has his or her own favourite statistics text. It all depends on how comfortable you feel with the author's approach. One popular book, which is light on mathematics but strong on computation, is:

- *General Statistics* (Second Edition, 1973)
  Haber, Audrey and Runyon, Richard
  Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.
  Reading, MA, USA

In studies with small sample sizes, the indispensable guide is:

- *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition, 1988)
  Siegel, Sidney
  McGraw-Hill Inc
  New York, NY, USA

Not for the uninitiated, but a goldmine of simple examples and, for the most part, quite easy tests in which the computations can be done 'by hand'.

User's reply form

to: Head, Studies and Evaluation
Bernard van Leer Foundation
PO Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands

We are interested in evaluation because:

We used *Introducing Evaluation* in the following way(s):

We particularly wanted to know about:

We found it: (tick the appropriate box) difficult ❑
just right ❑
too simple ❑

We felt that the most useful parts were:

We did not like:

We think it could be improved by:

As a result of using it we decided to:

Name:

Address:

SS

About the Foundation

The **Bernard van Leer Foundation** is an international, institution based in The Netherlands. Created in 1949 for broad humanitarian purposes, the Foundation concentrates its resources on support for early childhood development.

The Foundation takes its name from Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist who died in 1958 and gave the entire share capital of his worldwide enterprise for humanitarian purposes. The Foundation's income is derived from this enterprise – Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer – which is established in over 30 countries and whose core business is the manufacture of packaging products.

The central objective is to improve opportunities for young children who live in disadvantaged circumstances. The Foundation uses two main strategies to accomplish this objective:

- it supports the development of innovative field-based approaches in the area of early childhood development; and
- it shares relevant experience with as wide an audience as possible in order to influence policy and practice.

As part of its mandate, the Foundation supports evaluation, training and the dissemination of project experiences to an international audience. It communicates the outcomes of these activities to international agencies, institutions and governments, with the aim of improving practice and influencing policies to benefit children.

Over 100 projects are being supported in more than 40 countries around the world. These include industrialised as well as developing countries. In accordance with its Statutes, the Foundation gives preference in its project support to activities in countries where the company is established.

Further information about the Foundation and a list of publications and videos can be obtained from:

Bernard van Leer Foundation
PO Box 82334
2508 EH The Hague
The Netherlands

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